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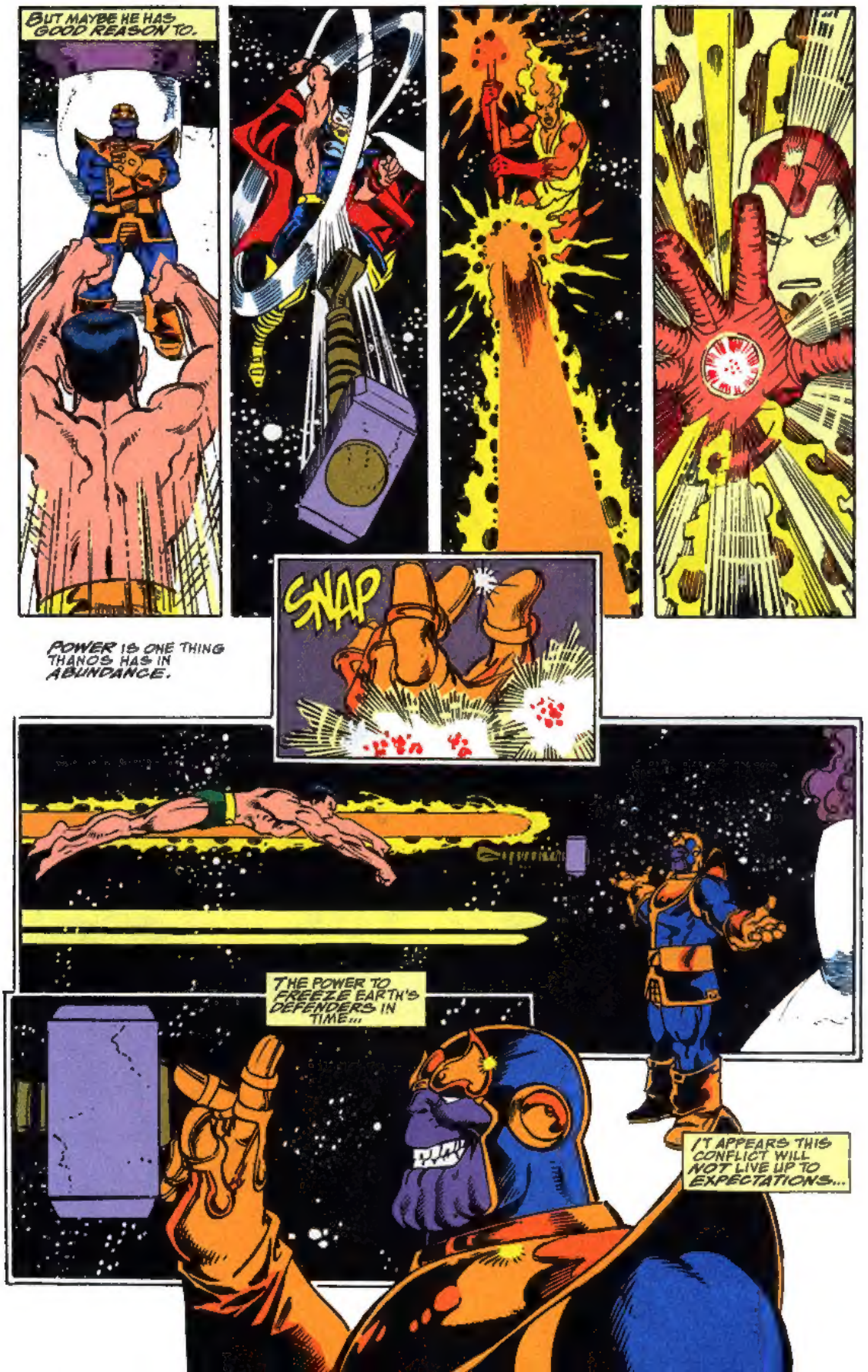
BUT MAYBE HE HAS GOOD REASON TO.
SNAP
POWER IS ONE THING THANOS HAS IN ABUNDANCE.
THE POWER TO FREEZE EARTH'S DEFENDERS IN TIME...
IT APPEARS THIS CONFLICT WILL NOT LIVE UP TO EXPECTATIONS...

...WILL NOT BE A...
COSMIC
BOOK
ON THE EDGE OF THE
UNIVERSE
JIM STARLIN
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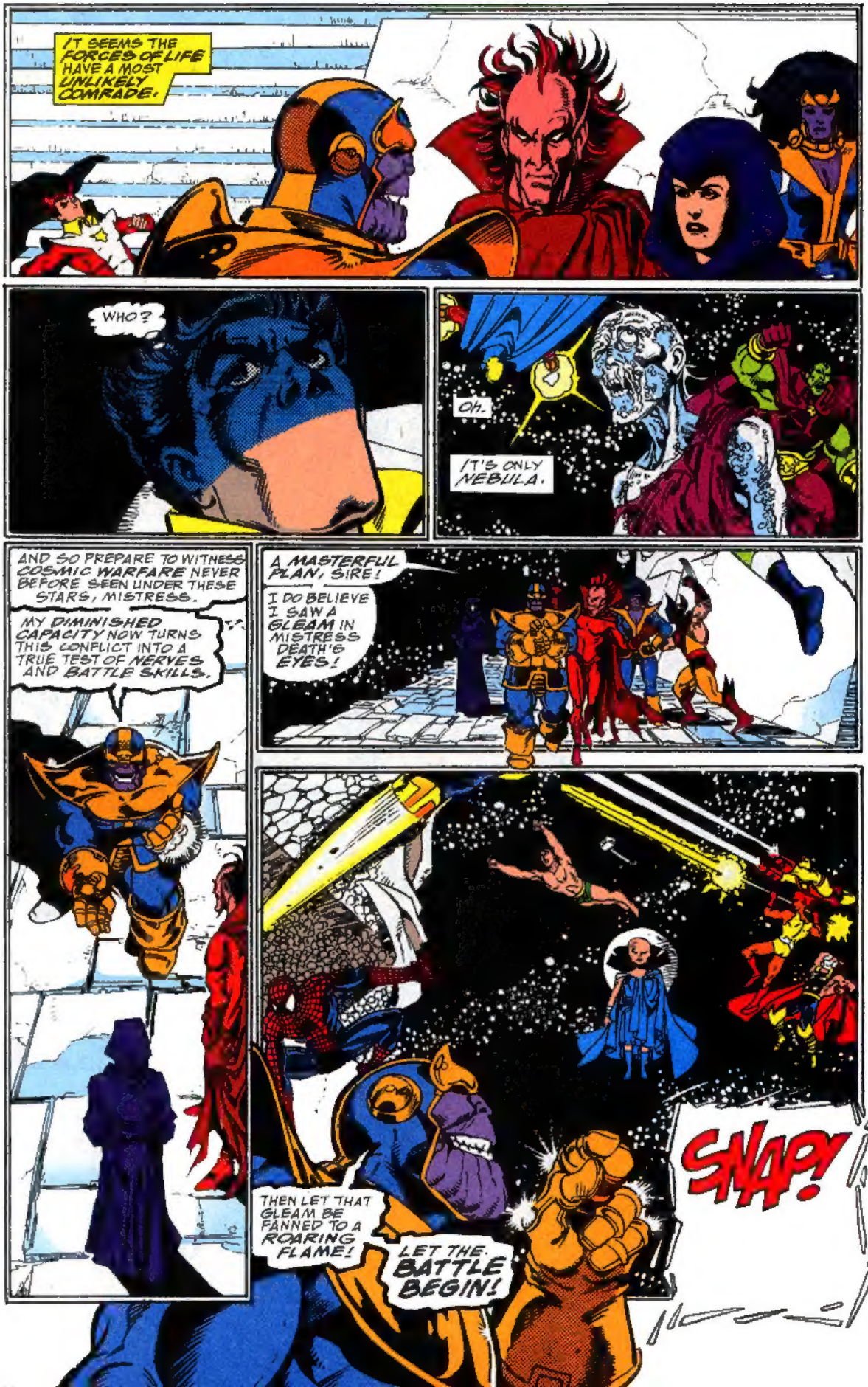
OF COURSE, THANOS HAS SPARED HIS ENTOURAGE THE INDIGNITY OF BEING RIPPED LOOSE FROM THE TIME FLOW.
MEPHISTO...
MISTRESS DEATH...
NEBULA...
TERRAXIA...
...AND MYSELF, EROS.
EVEN THE ENIGMATIC WATCHER WAS SPARED.
WHAT USE IS GODHOOD IF YOU HAVE NO AUDI-ENCE TO FLAUNT IT BEFORE.

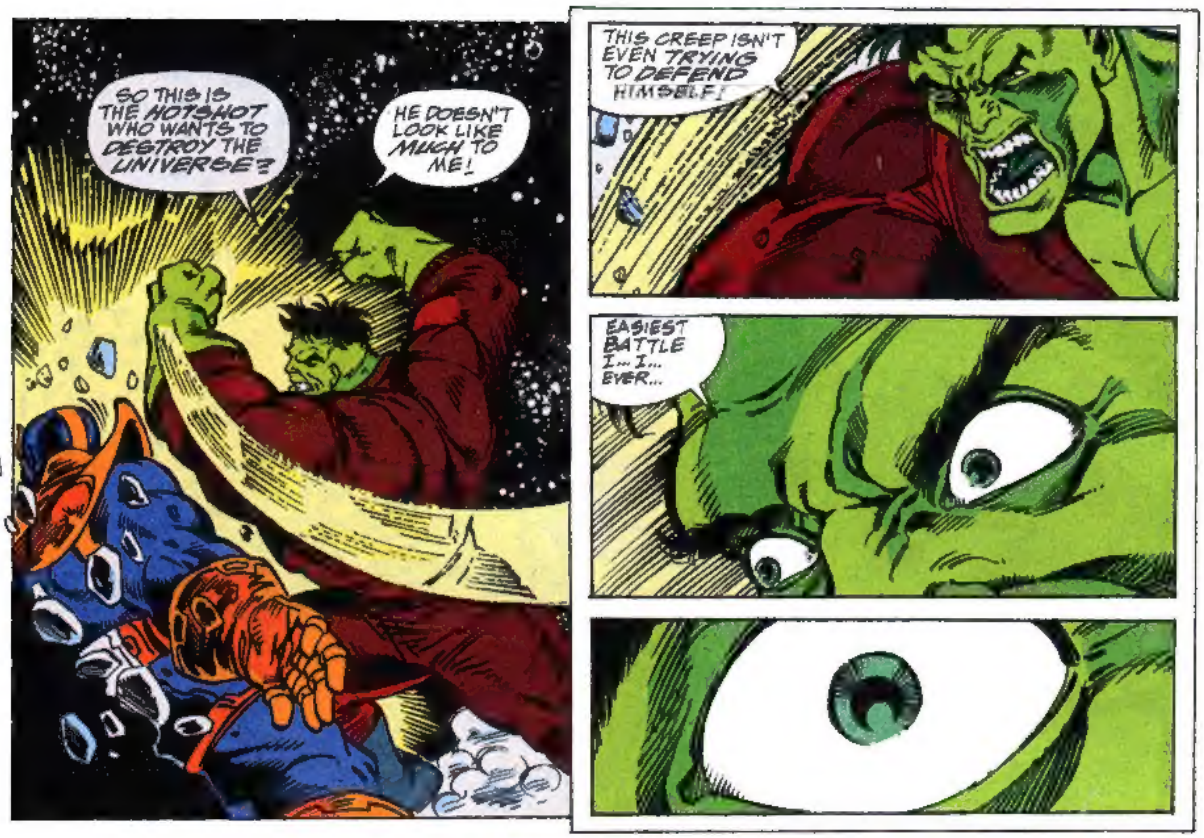
ARE THESE THE BEST THE UNIVERSE COULD SEND AGAINST ME?
SUCH A PUNY FORCE.
WITH BUT A THOUGHT I COULD TERMINATE THEIR ANNOYING EXISTENCES...
THERE ARE TWO OTHERS YOU MIGHT WISH TO INCLUDE IN YOUR THOUGHTS, MY LORD.
THE MORTAL KNOWN AS THE SILVER SURFER...
...AND MY ONE-TIME COMRADE, ADAM WARLOCK, RETURNED TO PLAGUE ME IN A NEW BODY...
THEY SEEM TO BE THE ONLY TWO ENTITIES IN THE GALAXY INTELLIGENT ENOUGH NOT TO CHALLENGE MY OMNIPOTENCE.
STILL, THEY SHOULD BE DISPATCHED WITH THE REST.
MY LORD THANOS, STAY THY HAND.
THE UNSEEMLY INTERRUPTION MAY JUST BE OPPORTUNITY DISGUISED.
SPEAK YOUR MIND, MEPHISTO.

YOU HAVE POWER WITHOUT LIMIT.
YET STILL YOU FAIL TO WIN MISTRESS DEATH'S HEART.
THESE BUFFOONS MAY PROVE USEFUL IN CHANGING THAT SITUATION.
HOW SO?
COURAGE, MY LIEGE.
ALL FEMALE HEARTS, EVEN ONE AS COLD AS DEATH'S, ARE WARMED BY THE SIGHT OF RAW COURAGE.
COURAGE SUCH AS IS EXHIBITED IN BATTLE.
BUT SUCH BRAVERY ONLY EXISTS WHEN ONE FACES THE PROSPECT OF DEFEAT.
MEETING THAT STANDARD WOULD REQUIRE BALANCING THE TERMS OF BATTLE SO THESE FOOLS STOOD A CHANCE OF VICTORY.
SOMETHING NOT BEYOND YOUR ABILITY TO ARRANGE.
YES.
YES... YES I CAN DO IT!
I NEED ONLY TO CUT MYSELF OFF FROM ALL SENSORY INPUT FROM TIME, SPACE, REALITY, THOUGHT AND THE SOUL.
I WOULD RETAIN LIMITLESS POWER, YET NOT KNOW MY ENEMIES' NEXT MOVE.
THAT WOULD ALLOW THEM A .06% CHANCE FOR VICTORY!
...NOT THE GREATEST ODDS IN THE UNIVERSE...
...BUT PERHAPS GOOD ENOUGH TO IMPRESS MISTRESS DEATH.
WHAT GAME IS MEPHISTO PLAYING HERE?
IT WAS MOST SUBTLY DONE, BUT THAT DEVIL JUST SAVED THE LIVES OF EARTH'S HEROES!
AND ENGINEERED THE POSSIBILITY OF THANOS'S DEFEAT!
THE MASTER OF DECEIT IS PLAYING UPON THE CONFUSION THANOS IS EXPERIENCING ADJUSTING TO HIS NEWLY ELEVATED STATE OF BEING.

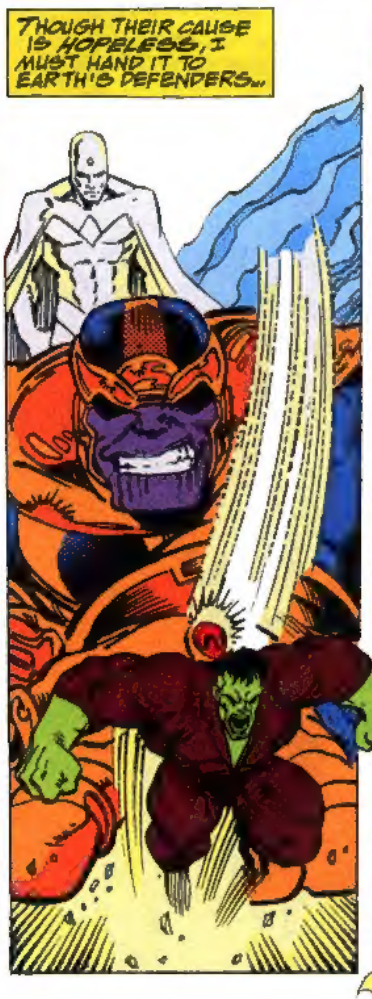

IT SEEMS THE FORCES OF LIFE HAVE A MOST UNLIKELY COMRADE.
WHO?
Oh.
IT'S ONLY NEBULA.
AND SO PREPARE TO WITNESS COSMIC WARFARE NEVER BEFORE SEEN UNDER THESE STARS, MISTRESS.
MY DIMINISHED CAPACITY NOW TURNS THIS CONFLICT INTO A TRUE TEST OF NERVES AND BATTLE SKILLS.
A MASTERFUL PLAN, SIRE!
I DO BELIEVE I SAW A GLEAM IN MISTRESS DEATH'S EYES!
THEN LET THAT GLEAM BE FANNED TO A ROARING FLAME!
LET THE BATTLE BEGIN!
SNAP!

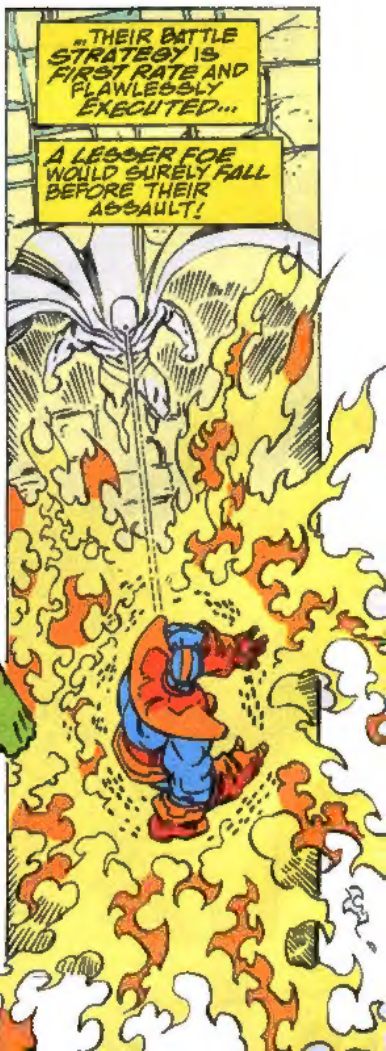
TIME RESUMES ITS NORMAL FLOW WITH BONE-JARRING RESULTS...
HA HA HA HA
HA HA HA HA
THEN...
...THE UNBELIEVABLE OCCURS!

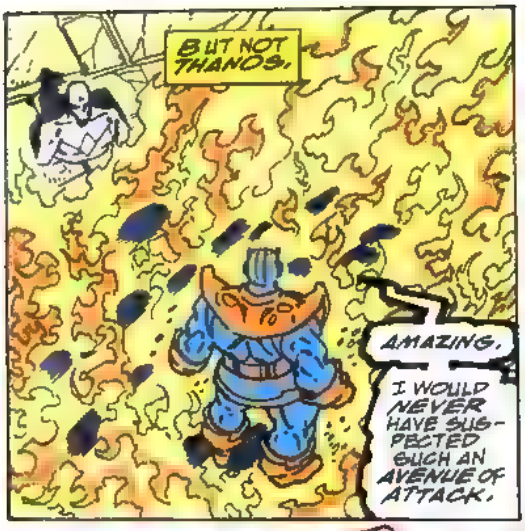
DRAX THE DESTROYER AND THE MONSTROUS HULK TAKE THANOS BY SURPRISE...!
HE TRULY HAS DAMPENED HIS COSMIC SENSES!
THANOS IS ACTUALLY PLAYING BY THE RULES! HOW OUT OF CHARACTER.
LOVE AND GOD-HOOD TRULY HAVE BEFUDDLED HIS REASON.
YET, DO EVEN THESE MIGHTY WARRIORS STAND A CHANCE AGAINST THANOS' VAST POWERS?
I DOUBT IT.
THEY ARE BUT BOTHERSOME FLEAS TO THANOS.


SO THIS IS THE HOTSHOT WHO WANTS TO DESTROY THE UNIVERSE?
HE DOESN'T LOOK LIKE MUCH TO ME!
THIS CREEP ISN'T EVEN TRYING TO DEFEND HIMSELF!
EASIEST BATTLE I... I... EVER...

WHAT?
HOW?

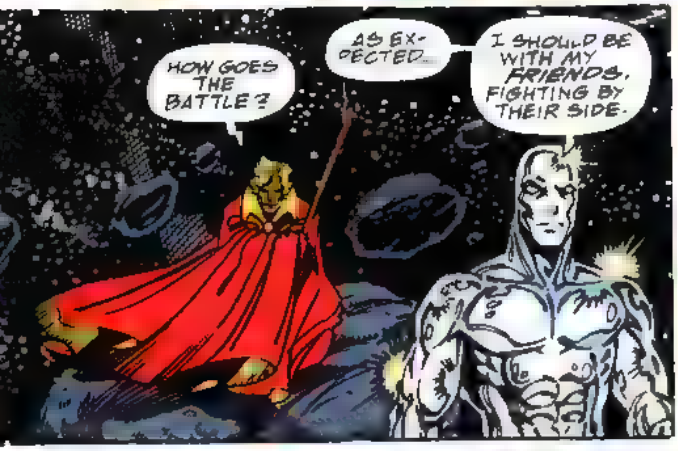

THOUGH THEIR CAUSE IS HOPELESS, I MUST HAND IT TO EARTH'S DEFENDERS...


...THEIR BATTLE STRATEGY IS FIRST RATE AND FLAWLESSLY EXECUTED...
A LESSER FOE WOULD SURELY FALL BEFORE THEIR ASSAULT!


BUT NOT THANOS.
AMAZING.
I WOULD NEVER HAVE SUSPECTED SUCH AN AVENUE OF ATTACK.

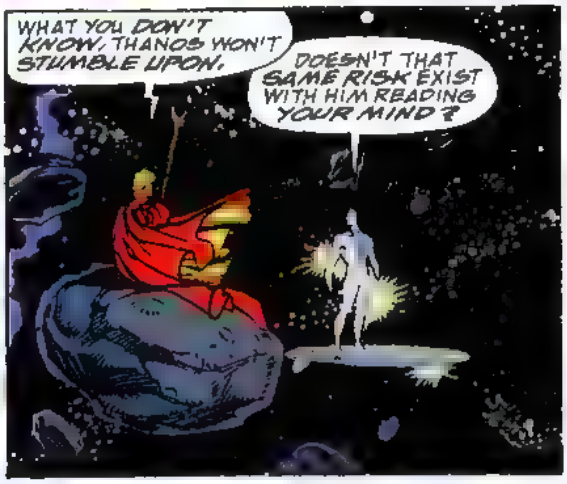
OF COURSE IT'S CAPTAIN AMERICA WHO LEADS THIS FIGHTING FORCE.
IT LOOKS LIKE WE'VE GOT THANOS CONFUSED!
POUR ON THE POWER!
FOLLOW THE PLAN!
AND HOPEFULLY A FEW OF US MIGHT SURVIVE!

VAIN HOPES...
I CAN ALREADY SENSE THANOS ADJUSTING TO HIS SITUATION, TAKING CONTROL OF THE BATTLE
THE SHE-HULK AND NAMOR MUST BE MERCILESS IF THEY HOPE TO PREVAIL.


HOW GOES THE BATTLE?
AS EXPECTED...
I SHOULD BE WITH MY FRIENDS, FIGHTING BY THEIR SIDE.

THAT WOULD BE UTTER FOLLY.
AND WHY IS THAT?

BECAUSE YOU HAVE A MAJOR ROLE TO PLAY IN THIS LITTLE GAME.
WHICH IS?
ALL IN DUE TIME, SURFER...

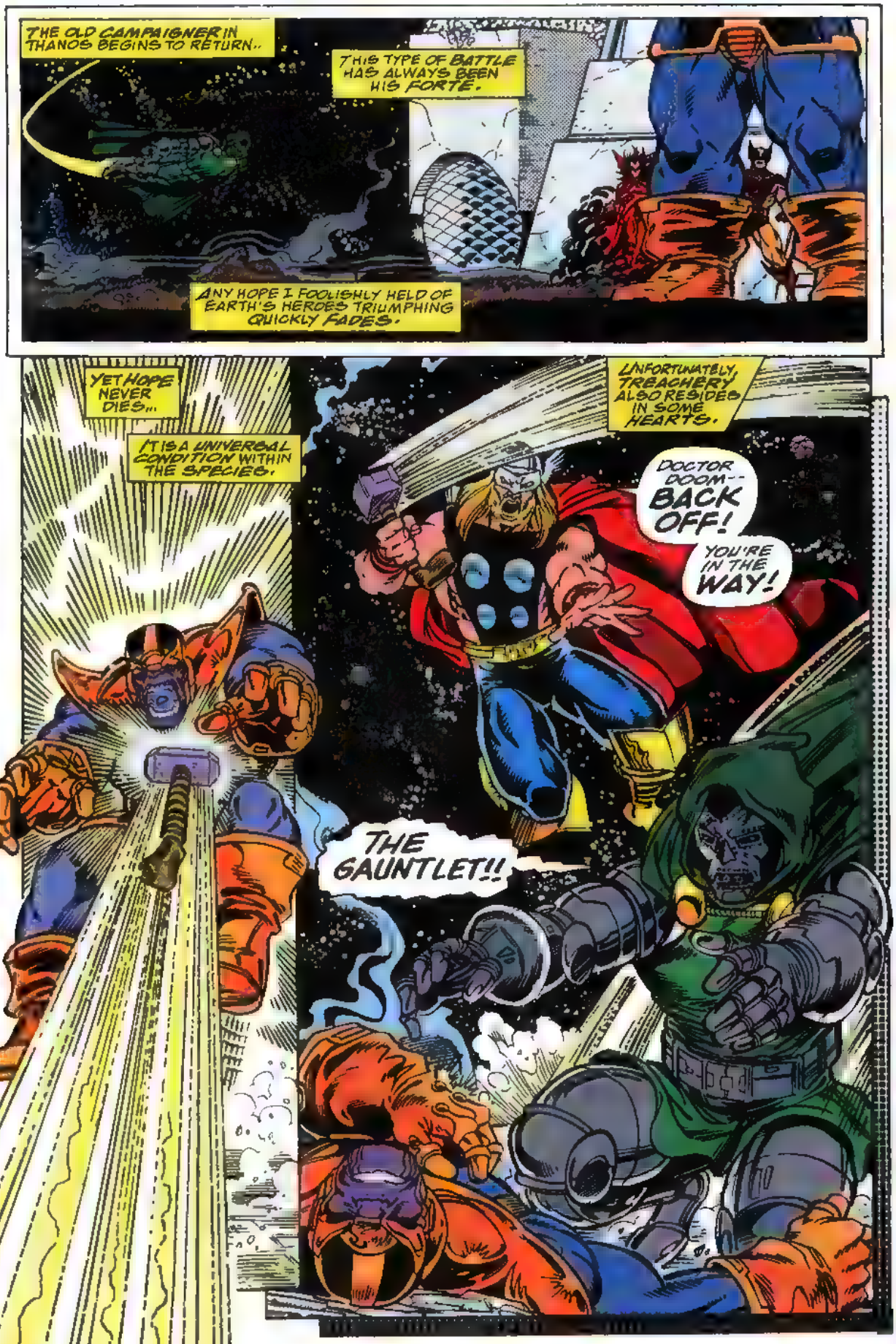

WHAT YOU DON'T KNOW, THANOS WON'T STUMBLE UPON.
DOESN'T THAT SAME RISK EXIST WITH HIM READING YOUR MIND?

NO.
THANOS KNOWS ME.
HE'LL NOT RISK SUCH A DISTRACTION WHILE IN THE MIDST OF BATTLE.

"THANOS HAS NARROWED THE SCOPE OF HIS GODHOOD JUST AS HE WAS BEGINNING TO ADJUST TO IT-
"HIS MIND MUST BE REELING FROM THE CHANGES.
"OF COURSE THAT MAKES HIM NO LESS DANGEROUS."
AWAY FROM ME YOU CLOWNS!

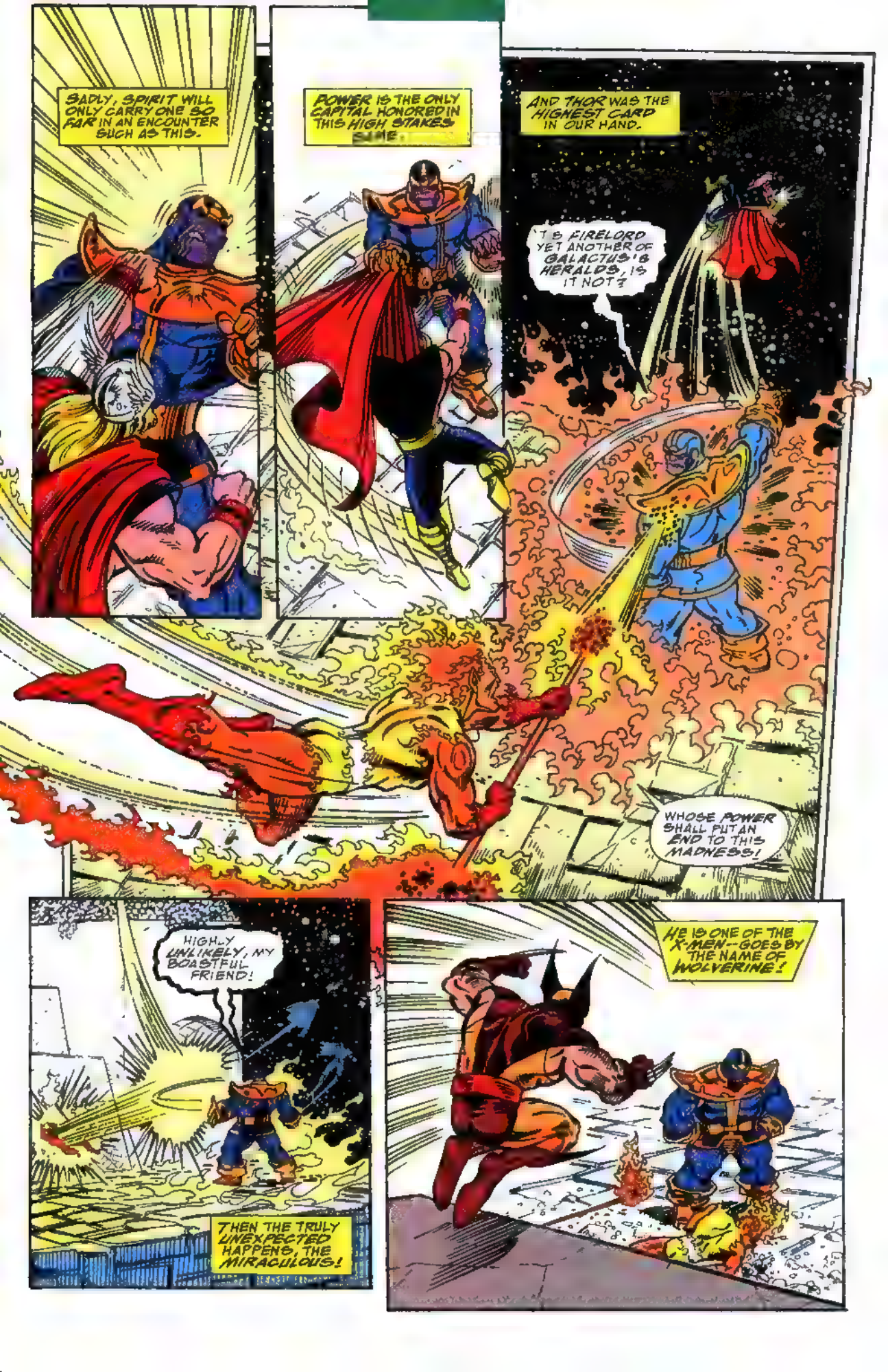
NAMOR--THERE'S SOMETHING GROWING WHERE THANOS TOUCHED US!!
REMOVE IT, QUICKLY!

SORRY, NAMOR, MY BROTHER WOULD NEVER LAY A TRAP SO EASILY EVADED.
TO YOUR SORROW, THERE ARE TRUTHS THAT CANNOT BE DENIED.
HE IS THANOS AND HIS NAME MEANS DEATH.

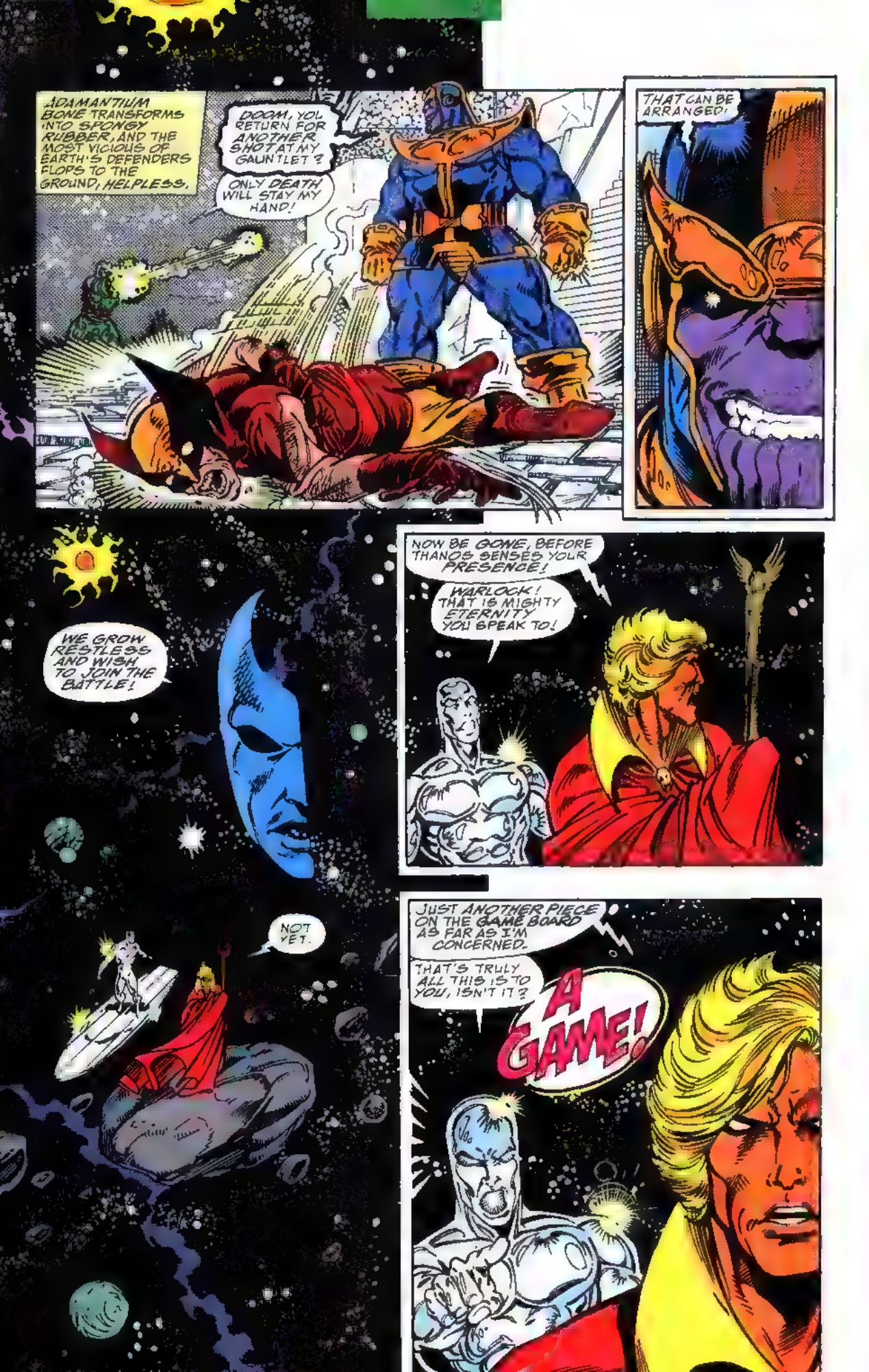

THE OLD CAMPAIGNER IN THANOS BEGINS TO RETURN..
THIS TYPE OF BATTLE HAS ALWAYS BEEN HIS FORTE.
ANY HOPE I FOOLISHLY HELD OF EARTH'S HEROES TRIUMPHING QUICKLY FADES.
YET HOPE NEVER DIES...
IT IS A UNIVERSAL CONDITION WITHIN THE SPECIES.
UNFORTUNATELY, TREACHERY ALSO RESIDES IN SOME HEARTS.
DOCTOR DOOM-- BACK OFF!
YOU'RE IN THE WAY!
THE GAUNTLET!!

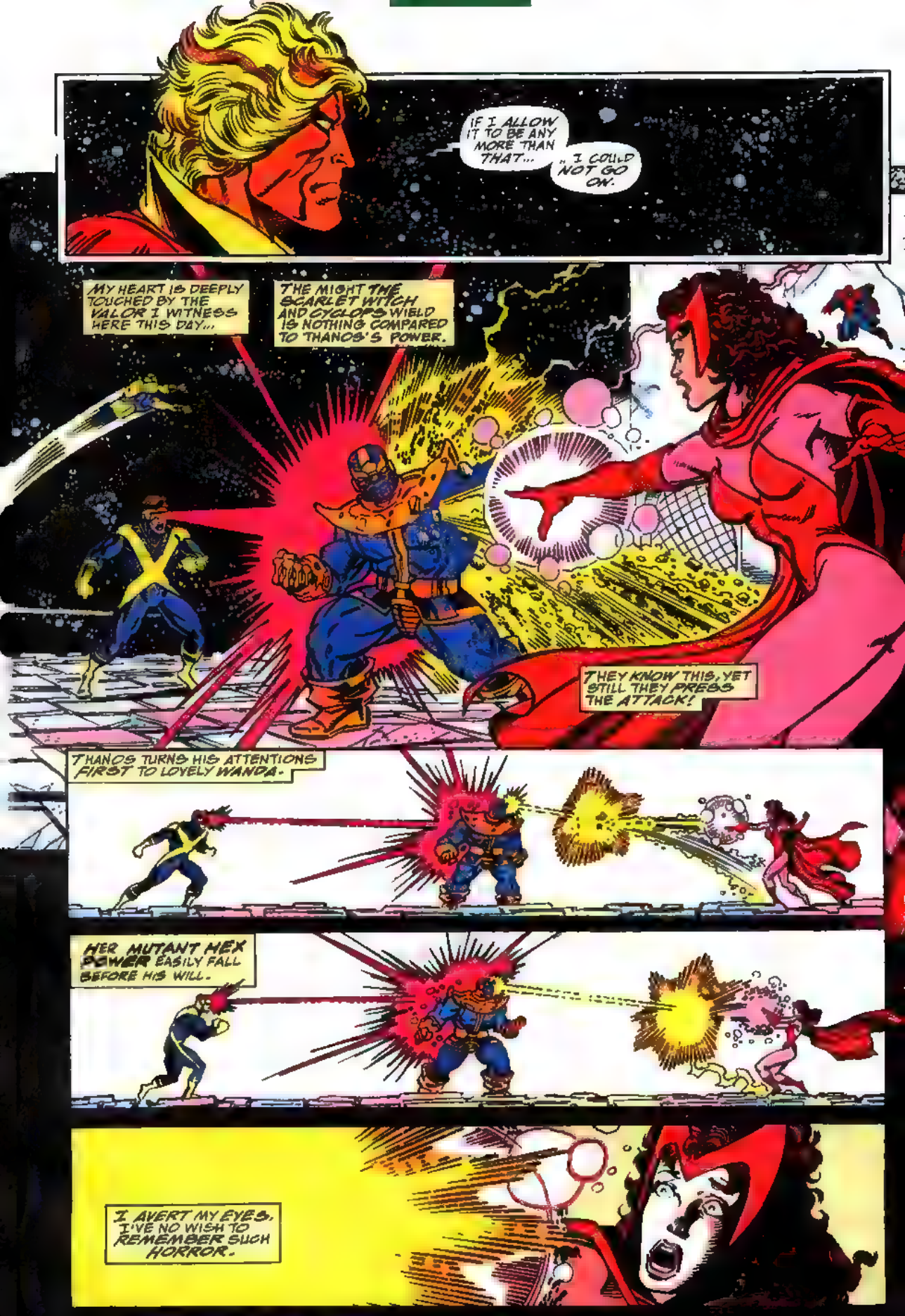
IT WILL BE MINE!
SUCH GREED ALWAYS CREATES ITS OWN REWARD.
DOOM TASTES THE BITTER NECTAR OF THANOS'S WRATH.
FORTUNATELY, HIS ARMOR'S DEFENSIVE SYSTEMS SAVE H M FROM SUFFERING TOTAL DEFEAT AND DESTRUCTION.
BUT ONCE AGAIN, A VALUABLE LESSON GOES UNAPPRECI-ATED.
I WILL NOT BE DENIED THOSE GEMS!

WHILE ONE WHO HAS ALWAYS KNOWN SUCH TRUTHS FIGHTS ON DESPITE ALL ODDS.
AND, IN TURN D SCOVERS NEW, MORE HORRIFYING REALITIES.
A TELEPORTATIONAL PORTAL CONJURED UP BY THE POWER SUPREME.
WITHOUT MY HAMMER, I'LL REVERT TO PLAIN OL ERIC MASTERSON IN A MERE 60 SECONDS!
HAVE TO MAKE EVERY MOMENT COUNT!
SO SAVAGE IS THE THUNDER GOD'S ATTACK THAT EVEN MIGHTY THANOS IS MOMENTARILY TAKEN ABACK!


SADLY, SPIRIT WILL ONLY CARRY ONE SO FAR IN AN ENCOUNTER SUCH AS THIS.
POWER IS THE ONLY CAPITAL HONORED IN THIS HIGH STAKES GAME.
AND THOR WAS THE HIGHEST CARD IN OUR HAND.
'T' IS FIRELORD YET ANOTHER OF GALACTUS'S HERALDS, IS IT NOT?
WHOSE POWER SHALL PUT AN END TO THIS MADNESS!
HIGHLY UNLIKELY, MY BOASTFUL FRIEND!
THEN THE TRULY UNEXPECTED HAPPENS, THE MIRACULOUS!
HE IS ONE OF THE X-MEN--GOES BY THE NAME OF WOLVERINE!

OF ALL THE COMBATANTS, HE WOULD'VE BEEN ONE OF THE LAST I THOUGHT CAPABLE OF DELIVERING THE DEATH BLOW.
BUT THEN MY HOPES PLUMMET FROM THE MOUNTAIN HEIGHTS TO THE DEPTHS OF THE DARK VALLEY.
EEYAARRGH!


ADAMANTIUM BONE TRANSFORMS INTO SPONGY RUBBER, AND THE MOST VICIOUS OF EARTH'S DEFENDERS FLOPS TO THE GROUND, HELPLESS.
DOOM, YOU RETURN FOR ANOTHER SHOT AT MY GAUNTLET?
ONLY DEATH WILL STAY MY HAND!
THAT CAN BE ARRANGED!
NOW BE GONE, BEFORE THANOS SENSES YOUR PRESENCE!
WARLOCK! THAT IS MIGHTY ETERNITY YOU SPEAK TO!
WE GROW RESTLESS AND WISH TO JOIN THE BATTLE!
NOT YET.
JUST ANOTHER PIECE ON THE GAME BOARD AS FAR AS I'M CONCERNED.
THAT'S TRULY ALL THIS IS TO YOU, ISN'T IT?
A GAME!


IF I ALLOW IT TO BE ANY MORE THAN THAT...
...I COULD NOT GO ON.
MY HEART IS DEEPLY TOUCHED BY THE VALOR I WITNESS HERE THIS DAY...
THE MIGHT THE SCARLET WITCH AND CYCLOPS WIELD IS NOTHING COMPARED TO THANOS'S POWER.
THEY KNOW THIS, YET STILL THEY PRESS THE ATTACK!
THANOS TURNS HIS ATTENTIONS FIRST TO LOVELY WANDA.
HER MUTANT HEX POWER EASILY FALL BEFORE HIS WILL.
I AVERT MY EYES. I'VE NO WISH TO REMEMBER SUCH HORROR.

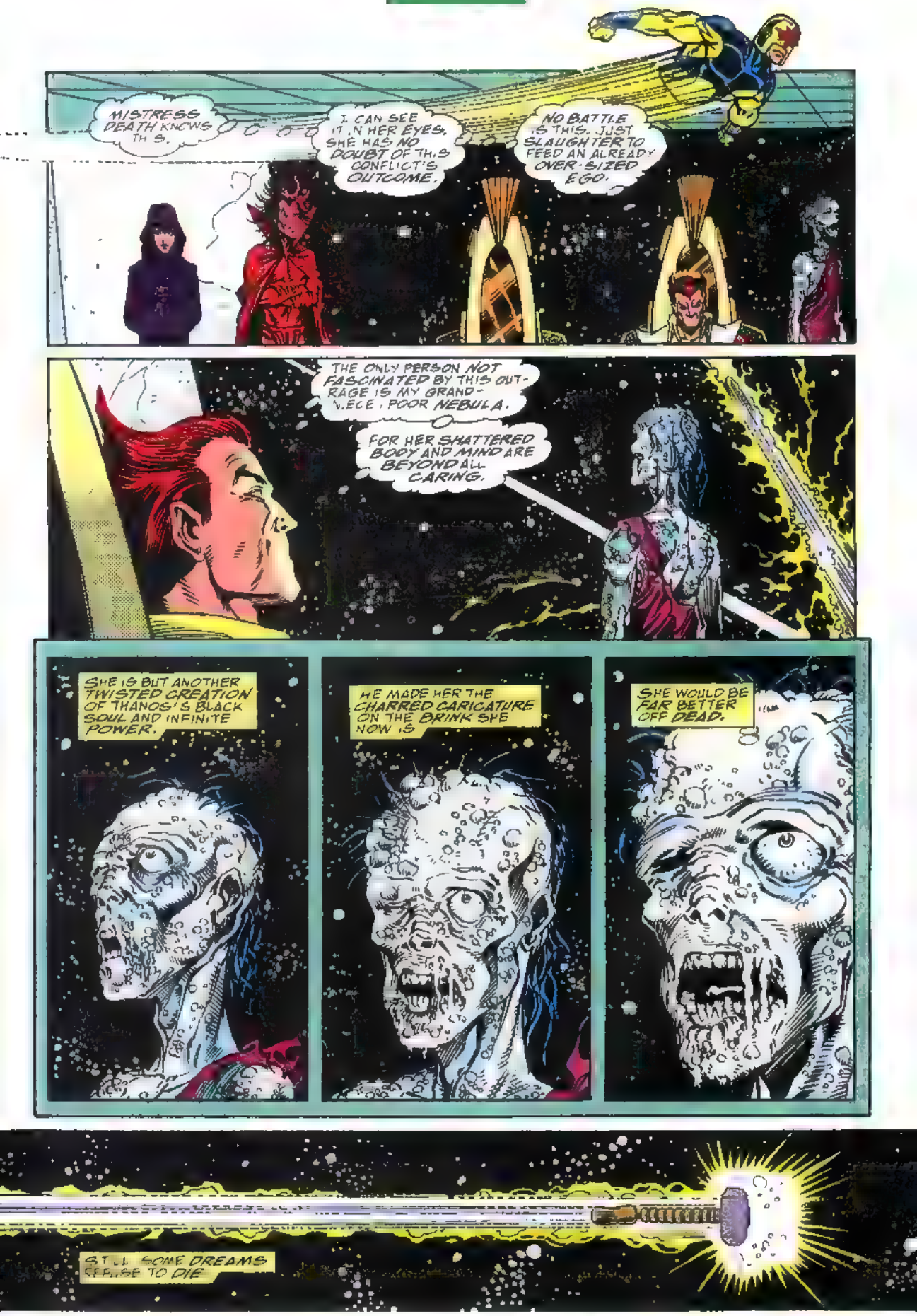
WANDA!
AND, NOW MY BRIGHT-EYED FOE, WE SHALL--
A MASTERFUL MOVE CUTTING OFF THE FORCE BEAM WHEN LEAST EXPECTED.
MY BROTHER PITCHES FORWARD, OFF BALANCE, AND THE AVENGER IRON MAN SWOOPS IN FOR THE KILL...
UNFORTUNATELY, THE METALLIC WARRIOR'S NAKED POWER IS NOT EQUAL TO HIS BATTLE PROWESS.

THEN THANOS'S NEWLY CREATED PERFECT WOMAN, TERRAXIA, JOINS THE FRAY
THE MAD GOD ALLOWS HER TO VENT HER ANGER AND FRUSTRATION ON THE GOLDEN AVENGER.
MY BROTHER SETS HIS SIGHTS ON THE X-MAN, CYCLOPS,
A CLEAR BLOCK OF FORCE ENVELOPS THE MUTANT'S HEAD...
...CUTTING OFF HIS FORCE BEAM IN MIDSTREAM--
--AND CUTTING OFF OXYGEN TO THE WARRIOR...
CAPTAIN AMERICA RUSHES TO THE FALLEN MUTANT'S AID, WHILE A ONCE SUCCESSFUL PLOY IS TRIED AGAIN.
BUT THANOS NEVER FALLS FOR THE SAME TRICK TWICE.

AND YET ANOTHER VALIANT SOUL FALLS.
JUST A LITTLE FARTHER
ALMOST THERE
I MADE IT!
BUT PERHAPS TOO LATE.
FOR THE MYSTIC SPELL DR STRANGE CAST SO THE THUNDER GOD COULD BREATHE IN THE DEPTH OF DARK SPACE...
...APPARENTLY DOES NOT EXTEND TO THIS MORTAL ERIC MASTERSON!
HE'S DEAD!
YOU MURDERED HIM, YOU COLD-HEARTED MONSTER!
SUCH AN EMOTIONAL OUTBURST--
--NOT AT ALL WHAT I EXPECTED FROM THE LEGENDARY CAPTAIN AMERICA!

UNLESS IT SERVES TO CREATE A CLEVER DIVERSION.
THE BEING KNOWN AS CLOAK DRAWS THE CRAZED TITAN INTO THE EBON FOLDS OF HIS CAPE...
...INTO A DARK AND FEARFUL DIMENSION.
YOU DID IT, CLOAK!
BUT CAN YOU HOLD HIM?!
DON'T KNOW--
I THINK.. I...
NO!

SUPREMACY CANNOT BE IMPRISONED!
MY DIVINITY IS ABSOLUTE!
YOURS IS A FALSE GODHOOD, TITAN!
AND ALL FALSE GODS EVENTUALLY FALL!
OR ARE TOPPLED!
THANOS LAUGHS AT THEIR DEFIANCE.
AND I AM CHILLED TO THE SOUL.
FOR THERE IS UNHOLY TRUTH IN THAT INSANE HOWL.


MISTRESS DEATH KNOWS THIS.
I CAN SEE IT IN HER EYES. SHE HAS NO DOUBT OF THIS CONFLICT'S OUTCOME.
NO BATTLE IS THIS. JUST SLAUGHTER TO FEED AN ALREADY OVER-SIZED EGO.
THE ONLY PERSON NOT FASCINATED BY THIS OUTRAGE IS MY GRANDNIECE, POOR NEBULA.
FOR HER SHATTERED BODY AND MIND ARE BEYOND ALL CARING.
SHE IS BUT ANOTHER TWISTED CREATION OF THANOS'S BLACK SOUL AND INFINITE POWER.
HE MADE HER THE CHARRED CARICATURE ON THE BRINK SHE NOW IS
SHE WOULD BE FAR BETTER OFF DEAD.
STILL SOME DREAMS REFUSE TO DIE

SOME SOULS NEVER KNOW WHEN THE CAUSE IS LOST.
SUCH IGNORANCE CAN BE TRULY AWE-INSPIRING!

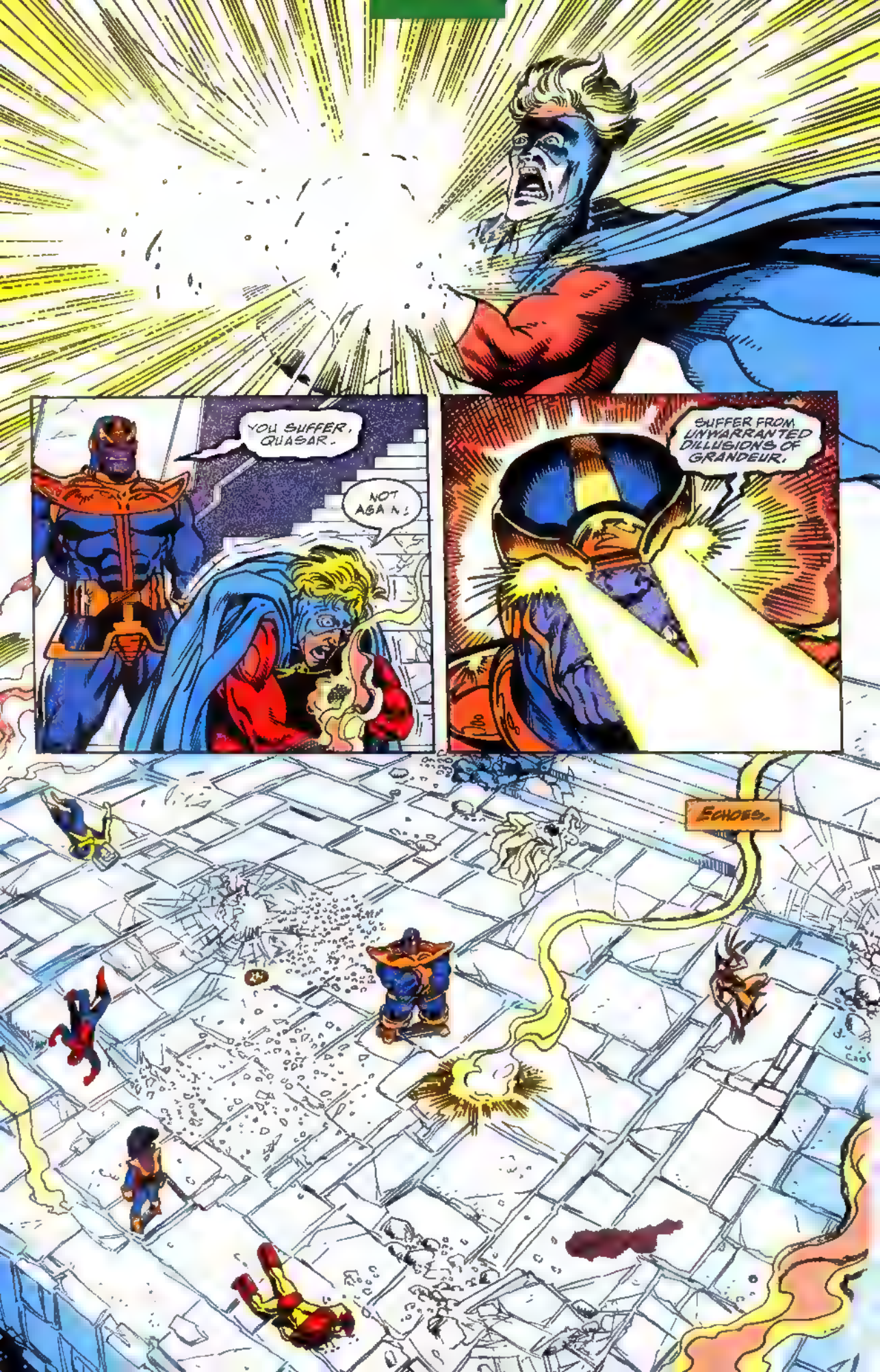
A TIME PORTAL OPENS.
AND MIGHTY FIRELORD AND DRAX THE DESTROYER FIND ITS PULL IRRESISTIBLE.
THEY FALL, LOST WITHIN EARTH'S PREHISTORIC PAST.
THANOS, MY LOVE, I HAVE DISPATCHED THE METAL-CLAD NUISANCE THAT PESTERED YOU!
MY THANKS, TERRAXIA.
YOU PROVE TO BE EXACTLY WHAT I HAD HOPED FOR.
A WOMAN WHO SHARES THE SAME VALUES I DO.
ONE I MIGHT EVEN COME TO--
WHAT?!

HE'S ALL YOURS, THOR!
I'LL TAKE CARE OF THE BIMBO!
GGRROOWW!
NOW YOU'RE IN FOR IT, MADMAN!
I THINK
YOU LAID WASTE TO HALF A UNIVERSE!
A BLACKER DEED I CAN'T IMAGINE!
IT'S TIME TO PAY THE PIPER!
THAT'S IT, THOR! STAY NOT YOUR HAND!
THANOS MUST DIE!!

OR ALL IS LOST.
GOOD GOD!
THANOS HAS TURNED THOR INTO GLASS!!
A GRIM, BOTTOMLESS ACCEPTANCE OF OUR FATE FINALLY CLAIMS ME.
THANOS IS INEVITABLE.
ALL THAT IS LEFT ARE TEARS.

AND THE ECHOES OF DREAMS SHATTERED.
BACK OFF, PRUNE FACE!
NO ONE'S BUSTIN' UP THOR WHILE NOVA'S AROUND.
LIKE A CHILD'S TOY BLOCKS.
ECHOES.

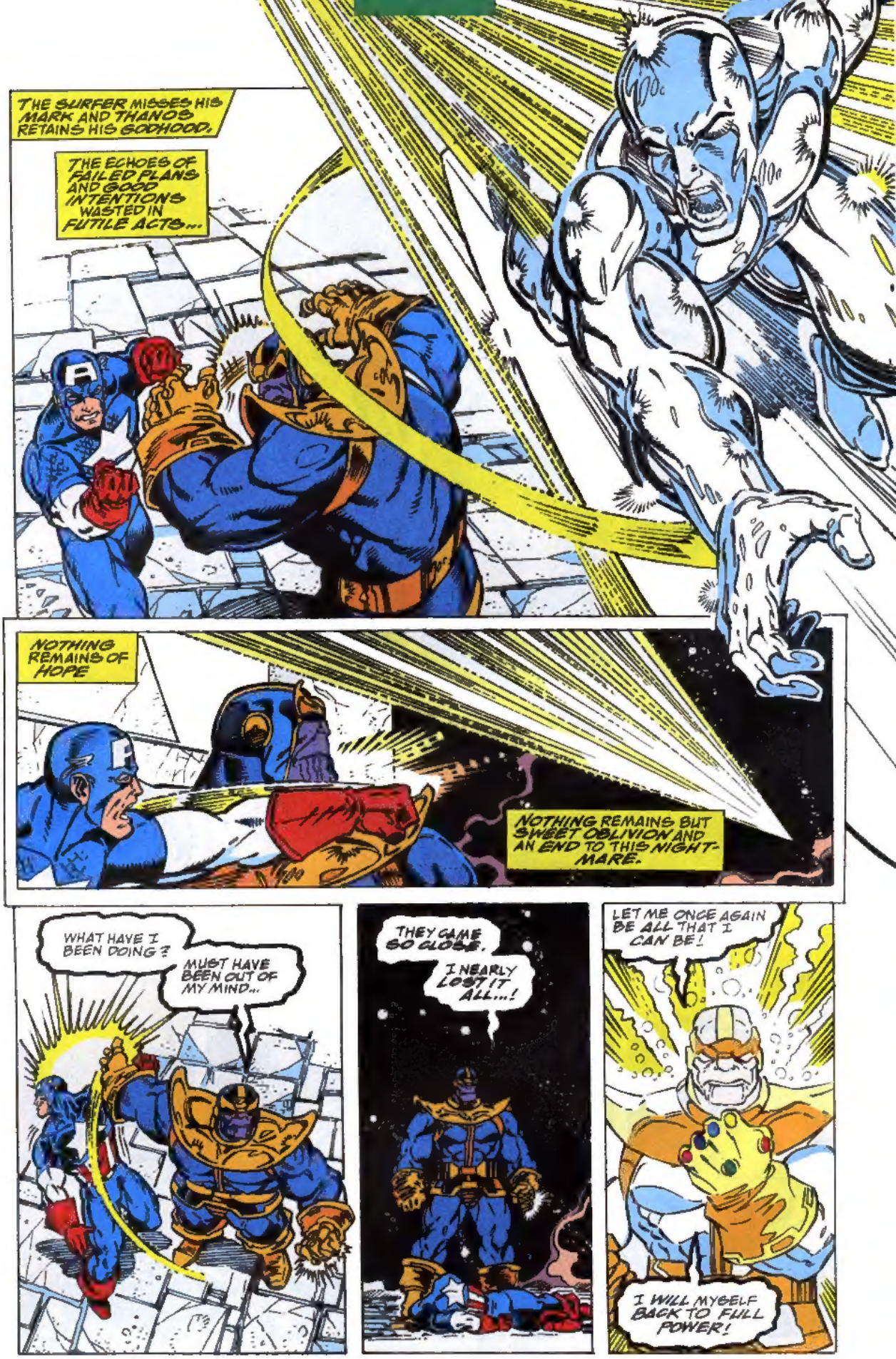
TURN AND FACE ME, THANOS.
FINALLY, THE REBENTES ARE CALLED IN.
YOU ARE QUASAR, THE LATE CAPTAIN MARVEL'S REPLACEMENT.
AND WIELDER OF THE QUANTUM-BANDS.
THEY SHALL PROVE TO BE YOUR DOWNFALL!


YOU SUFFER, QUASAR.
NOT AGAIN!
SUFFER FROM UNWARRANTED DILLUSIONS OF GRANDEUR.
ECHOES.

IT'S NOT OVER UNTIL THE FAT LADY SINGS, THANOS.
SURELY YOU JEST?
NEVER BEEN ANY GOOD AT STAND-UP ROUTINES.
WE TRIED.
OR AT ORGANIZING A COSMIC ASSAULT, I SEE.
READY YOURSELF.
NOW?
ON MY CALL.

AS LONG AS ONE MAN STANDS AGAINST YOU, THANOS, YOU'LL NEVER BE ABLE TO CLAIM VICTORY.
NOBLE SENTIMENTS FROM ONE WHO IS ABOUT TO DIE.
THANOS IS GOING TO KILL HIM!
WAIT!!
I'VE LIVED MY LIFE BY THOSE SENTIMENTS.
THEY'RE WELL WORTH DYING FOR.
HUH?
THEN DIE YOU SHALL!
THANOS IS ALWAYS PLEASED TO HONOR SUCH A FOOLISH REQUEST!

ECHOES.
NOW!


THE SURFER MISSES HIS MARK AND THANOS RETAINS HIS GODHOOD.
THE ECHOES OF FAILED PLANS AND GOOD INTENTIONS WASTED IN FUTILE ACTS...
NOTHING REMAINS OF HOPE
NOTHING REMAINS BUT SWEET OBLIVION AND AN END TO THIS NIGHT-MARE.
WHAT HAVE I BEEN DOING?
MUST HAVE BEEN OUT OF MY MIND...
THEY CAME SO CLOSE.
I NEARLY LOST IT ALL...!
LET ME ONCE AGAIN BE ALL THAT I CAN BE!
I WILL MYSELF BACK TO FULL POWER!

I WISH THIS BATTLEFIELD CLEARED OF ALL REMNANTS OF--
--THE FOLLY I NEARLY ALLOWED!
FOR I SENSE A FAR GREATER STRUGGLE ABOUT TO BEGIN.
WE TRIED TO DO THIS THE EASY WAY--AND FAILED.
NOW BEGINS THE CONFLICT I STROVE TO AVOID.
IT MAY WELL PROVE TO BE A BATTLE THE UNIVERSE CANNOT SURVIVE!
ETERNITY... IT IS NOW YOUR TURN.

DESPITE MY BEST EFFORTS, I CANNOT SHUT MY EYES TO THE AWESOME SIGHT NO MORTAL WAS EVER MEANT TO SEE.
ARMAGEDDON COMMENCES IN BUT SECONDS, AND I HAVE A FRONT ROW SEAT FOR THE EVENT.

I PRAY MY END COMES QUICKLY, FOR THE UNIVERSE IS ABOUT TO BECOME A PLACE I NO LONGER WISH TO BE A PART OF.
NEXT:
ASTRAL
CONFLAGRATION